

Jack Anderson

FBI Smear Tactics in Silkwood Case

The FBI has had an ugly habit of smearing its critics with unfounded sex rumors. In its campaign of harassment, the bureau has spread unsubstantiated rumors about the supposed sexual peccadilloes of a powerful congressman, a dedicated congressional staff aide, a respected newspaper publisher and a persistent union official.

My office has obtained dramatic new evidence in the celebrated Karen Silkwood case. Silkwood, the 28-year-old lab technician, was killed in a mysterious car crash in 1974, while she was on her way to give a reporter documentary evidence of lax safety regulations at the Kerr-McGee plutonium plant in Oklahoma.

There was considerable evidence that her car was run off the road and the incriminating evidence stolen. But the FBI declared there was no foul play involved. Last May, a federal jury awarded her estate \$10.5 million in damages after finding that she had been subjected to excessive radiation at the plant.

Sources have revealed to my associate Gary Cohn an insidious pattern of FBI harassment directed against those who have criticized the agency's role in the Silkwood case.

• Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) conducted an investigation into the case in 1976—a probe that was extremely embarrassing to the FBI. During the hearings, a news story appeared about a prostitute with Mafia connections who supposedly kept a list of her clients stashed in a shoe box. The Detroit story claimed Dingell's name was on her list. Dingell denied the unsubstantiated accusation. Competent sources

told us that the FBI leaked the spurious charge.

• Peter Stockton conducted the Silkwood investigation for Dingell's small business subcommittee. In the course of their digging, Dingell and Stockton learned that Jacques Srouji, a copy editor at the Nashville Tennessean, had gained access to FBI documents in the case that had been denied to the subcommittee. They further discovered that Frouji was an FBI informant, and had been used by the bureau in a case involving a Soviet diplomat.

Disclosure of this brought criticism of the FBI from the Justice Department, Congress and the press. The bureau evidently put Stockton on its enemies list, and in 1977 found a way to strike back at him.

Compelled to release certain internal documents for use in the Silkwood lawsuit, the FBI, as required by the Privacy Act, diligently deleted the names of third parties not involved in the suit—all except Stockton's.

In the transcript of an FBI interview with Kerr-McGee security chief James Reading, reference was made to his contacts with Stockton, who was working for National Public Radio at the time, and another reporter. The second reporter's name was deleted; Stockton's was not.

After noting Stockton's two attempts to interview Reading, the transcript stated, "Again he declined to talk with the reporters, but he did learn from certain of his sources that they didn't accomplish too much because Stockton spent most of his time visiting local prostitutes and not working."

• John Seigenthaler, publisher of the Tennessean, responded to the disclosure that Srouji was an FBI informant by firing her on May 5, 1976. The next day, the FBI in Memphis, wired headquarters about "allegations of Seigenthaler having illicit relations with young girls." A few days later, the Memphis bureau, finding no truth to the allegations, notified Washington that they were, after all, "unfounded rumor."

This didn't stop a high FBI official from telling two New York Times reporters later that "Seigenthaler is not entirely pure."

• Steven Wodka, an official of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, kept prodding federal agencies to investigate Silkwood's charges of poor safety procedures at the nuclear plant. Information later turned up in FBI files falsely charging that Wodka had sexual relations with Silkwood.

• Other derogatory information about Silkwood's alleged sex life is also scattered through the FBI files.

Footnote: An FBI spokesman declined comment. Meanwhile, Stockton's attorney, Ted Jacobs and the Fund for Constitutional Government plan to file suit against FBI officials and Kerr-McGee executives for conspiracy to deprive Stockton of his constitutional rights.

Digging In—The Soviets' move to make the ruble the official currency of Afghanistan is further proof—if any were needed—that the Russians plan to stay there a long, long time.